

ON CATHOLICISM

As Revealed in the latest Encyclical of His Holiness Pope Pius XI

IN this, the *Casti Conubii*, the Pope delivers an uncompromising ultimatum not only to eugenists, but to all who seek to order their own affairs in the light of science and human judgment. It is a defiant return to mediævalism and by far the most courageous of recent Papal utterances; for it will undoubtedly drive many from the fold and deter many more, while it will regiment the faithful into a compacter body of ardent and well-disciplined militants. It is characterized by that beauty and dignity of language which are the peculiar prerogative of them that believe they are but the vehicles of thoughts greater than themselves.

It was to be expected that the Church would reaffirm the sacramental and indissoluble nature of marriage, and there is nothing surprising in the renewed unqualified condemnation of divorce, as not only sinful, but impossible, since the sacrament is eternal.

But what is both new and disturbing is the declaration of *all* marriage, Catholic or Protestant, Christian or Pagan, as equally sacred and indissoluble. His Holiness calls upon the civil power to respect this law of nature and God, and he thereby implicitly adjures the faithful in all lands to exercise their influence against measures of divorce, whether or not they affect Catholics—

“Hence it is clear that marriage even in the state of nature and certainly long before it was raised to the dignity of a sacrament was divinely instituted in such a way that it should carry with it a perpetual and indissoluble bond which cannot therefore be dissolved by any civil law. . . .

“Wherefore, both for the private good of husband, wife, and children, as likewise for the public good of human society, they indeed deserve well who strenuously defend the inviolable stability of matrimony.”

This can scarcely mean less than that Catholic electors should seek control of non-Catholic marriages.

THE SUBJECTION OF THE WIFE

Of less moment, but more surprising, is the Pope's uncompromising return to the mediæval attitude towards the mutual relations of man and wife.

“Domestic society being confirmed, therefore, by this bond of love there should flourish in it that ‘order of love,’ as St. Augustine calls it. This order includes both the primacy of the husband with regard to the wife and children, the ready subjection of the wife and her willing obedience, which the Apostle commends in these words: ‘Let women be subject to their husbands as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the Church.’”

Howsoever the pill is later gilded by a glorification of wifehood, it requires courage to command an educated modern woman to recognize her husband as her master. This command will probably do more than any other to make apostates, deter the wavering, and strengthen the hearts of the truly faithful.

Also of more moment to general humanity than of particular eugenic interest is the unqualified denouncement of abortion. In no circumstances may the “innocent” be murdered; and neither may the mother die to save her infant, nor the foetus be killed to save her pain, her health, her life. While thus condemning many a woman to die in the hopeless agonies of childbirth, His Holiness reminds her that, however great those sufferings, she will be amply rewarded in Heaven.

“However much we may pity the mother whose health and even life is

gravely imperilled in the performance of the duty allotted to her by nature, nevertheless what could ever be a sufficient reason for excusing in any way the direct murder of the innocent? This is precisely what we are dealing with here. Whether inflicted upon the mother or upon the child, it is against the precept of God and the law of nature: 'Thou shalt not kill.' The life of each is equally sacred, and no one has the power, not even the public authority, to destroy it."

The attitude recalls that which, for the integrity of the Church, condemned Joan of Arc to the stake.

BIRTH-CONTROL—AND THE SAFE PERIOD

The same attitude characterizes the renewed condemnation of birth control in any circumstances whatever, whether the family is already over-large and poverty acute, whether merely to space the births, or even when another confinement would cause an abortion, a defective child, or the death of the mother.

"Holy Mother Church very well understands and clearly appreciates all that is said regarding the health of the mother and the danger to her life. And who would not grieve to think of these things? Who is not filled with the greatest admiration when he sees a mother risking her life with heroic fortitude, that she may preserve the life of the offspring which she has conceived? God alone, all bountiful and all merciful as He is, can reward her for the fulfilment of the office allotted to her by nature, and will assuredly repay her in a measure full to overflowing."

The reason given is that the reproductive act is itself as sacred as marriage and must not be performed to its own frustration. Hence celibacy, abstinence from intercourse, and — curious inconsistency — the 'safe period' are the only alternatives for good Catholics.

This renewal of the licence of the 'safe period' is doubly surprising, not so much

because recent research has thrown yet further doubt on its safeness, but mainly because, in so far as it is effective, it deliberately frustrates the results of intercourse no less than does contraception.

It is strange that Catholics so seldom, if ever, advance the strongest, least answerable, and surely most 'natural' objection against contraception — the æsthetic objection. If an act is repugnant, there's an end on't.

But many as are the other inconsistencies in Catholic attitude and writings, even within this little Encyclical, it is not our aim here to expose Catholics to themselves, nor to dispute on the debatable premisses they adopt. As eugenists, our interest lies in the practical effect of their doctrines; and this Encyclical deals the final blow to our hopes of coming to an agreement with them — writing as long ago as 1921,* indeed, the Dean of St. Paul's said that such an agreement was no longer possible. But though a few eminent theologians had hitherto strongly supported sterilization, though others had theoretically admitted its moral justification, and though many had long been opposed to the marriage of mental defectives, the Pope here issues an unqualified condemnation of both sterilization and the prohibition of marriage.

STERILIZATION TO BE ILLEGAL

Voluntary sterilization he declares to be unholy, partly because, like birth control, it frustrates the procreative act, and partly because it is permitted to none to mutilate himself. As for State action, His Holiness writes:

"Finally, that pernicious practice must be condemned which closely touches upon the natural right of man to enter matrimony but affects also in a real way the welfare of the offspring. For there are some who over solicitous for the cause of eugenics, not only give salutary counsel for more certainly procuring the strength

* EUGENICS REVIEW, Vol. XII, No. 4.

and health of the future child—which, indeed, is not contrary to right reason—but put eugenics before aims of a higher order, and by public authority wish to prevent from marrying all those who, even though naturally fit for marriage, they consider according to the norms and conjectures of their investigations, would, through hereditary transmission, bring forth defective offspring. And more, they wish to legislate to deprive these of that natural faculty by medical action despite their unwillingness; and this they do not propose as an infliction of grave punishment under the authority of the State for a crime committed, nor to prevent future crimes by guilty persons, but against every right and good, they wish the civil authority to arrogate to itself a power over a faculty which it never had and can never legitimately possess. . . .

“Those who act in this way are at fault in losing sight of the fact that the family is more sacred than the State, and that men are begotten not for the earth and for time, but for Heaven and eternity. Although often these individuals are to be dissuaded from entering into matrimony, certainly it is wrong to brand men with the stigma of crime because they contract marriage, on the ground that, despite the fact that they are in every respect capable of matrimony, they will give birth only to defective children, even though they use all care and diligence.

“Public magistrates have no direct power over the bodies of their subjects; therefore, where no crime has taken place and there is no cause present for grave punishment, they can never directly harm, or tamper with the integrity of the body, either for the reasons of eugenics or for any other reason. . . .”

The authority here quoted is St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summ. theol.* 2a, 2æ, q. 1080a 4 ad 2 um.), which is curious, since the Angelic Doctor himself, in a much more relevant passage, gives express permission to the State to protect itself even by castration (see the January 1930 issue of this REVIEW).

Surely what the State can do by force, is still more permissible with the consent of the object? And if the major operation of castration is allowable, how much more so must be the minor operation of sterilization?

But this is another lapse into dialectics on premisses with which no non-Catholic can agree. The important point is that Catholics, who have hitherto been in many ways strongly sympathetic with eugenic aims, though disapproving of some eugenic methods, have now declared themselves unalterably opposed to the two remaining methods, whether they affect themselves or those of other faiths.

But there is more than that.

SCIENCE AND LIBERTY OF THOUGHT

At the beginning of this survey it was written advisedly that the Encyclical was a return to the Middle Ages. Its mediævalism is carried so far as to ignore all anthropology, all history not contained in Genesis, and to attack not only the practice of eugenics, but also the underlying biological bases. Not only is current biology specifically attacked, but an onslaught is made on the whole texture of science and the liberty of thought. Witness these passages:

“They are greatly deceived who having underestimated or neglected these [religious] means which rise above nature, think that they can induce men by the use and discovery of the natural sciences, such as those of biology, the science of heredity, and the like, to curb their carnal desires. We do not say this in order to belittle those natural means which are not dishonest . . . for God is the Author of nature as well as of grace, and He has disposed the good things of both orders for the beneficial use of men. The faithful, therefore, can and ought to be assisted also by natural means. But they are mistaken who think that these means are able to establish chastity in the nuptial union, or that they are more effective than supernatural grace. . . .

“But everyone can see to how many fallacies an avenue would be opened up

and how many errors would become mixed with the truth, if it were left solely to the light of reason of each to find it out, or if it were to be discovered by the private interpretation of the truth which is revealed. . . .

" . . . it is necessary that a filial and humble obedience towards the Church should be combined with devotedness to God and the desire of submitting to Him. . . .

" Wherefore, let the faithful also be on their guard against the overrated independence of private judgment and that false autonomy of human reason."

A CALL TO A CRUSADE

While we must admire the beauty and dignity of the language, the courage which inspires it, we must sadly realize that there can henceforth be no truce between ourselves, who seek our own salvation by our own way, and the crusaders of Rome. For this seems much more than a call to individual Catholics to revert to mediævalism: it is, if our reading is correct, a call to a crusade against freedom of thought and action in the modern State. Not only may no Catholic procure or allow abortion, even to save the woman's life, but all Catholics seem to be adjured to force that prohibition on their governments; not only may no Catholic seek dissolution of marriage, but none, it appears, may support a government which allows divorce; not only is contraception declared unholy, but seemingly it must henceforth be made illegal; not only may no Catholic be sterilized compulsorily, but no free-thinker apparently shall seek the operation for himself.

That, at least, is our interpretation, for the attitude seems to be implicit in many of the passages already quoted, and to inspire the tone of the whole Encyclical. See—

" But especially, as we have pointed out, Venerable Brethren, the daily increasing facility of divorce is an obstacle to the restoration of marriage to that state of perfection which the divine Redeemer willed it should possess.

" The advocates of the neo-paganism of to-day have learned nothing from the sad state of affairs, but instead day by day, more and more vehemently, they continue by legislation to attack the indissolubility of the marriage bond, proclaiming that the lawfulness of divorce must be recognized, and that the antiquated laws should give place to a new and more humane legislation. . . .

" Opposed to all these reckless opinions, Venerable Brethren, stands the unalterable law of God, fully confirmed by Christ, *a law that can never be deprived of its force by the decrees of men, the ideas of a people or the will of any legislator: 'What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.'* . . .

" Moreover, *these words refer to every kind of marriage, even that which is natural and legitimate only*; for, as has already been observed, that indissolubility by which the loosening of the bond is once and for all removed from the whim of the parties and from every secular power is a property of every true marriage. . . .

" Now all those arguments that are brought forward to prove the indissolubility of the marriage tie, arguments which have already been touched upon, can equally be applied to excluding not only the necessity of divorce, *but even the power to grant it.* . . ."

[The italics are ours.]

And again, " Just laws must be made for the protection of chastity, for reciprocal conjugal aid, and for similar purposes, and these must be *faithfully enforced.* . . .

" Hence we earnestly exhort in the Lord all those who hold the reins of power that they establish and maintain firmly harmony and friendship with this Church of Christ so that through the united activity and energy of both powers the tremendous evils, fruits of those wanton liberties which assail both marriage and the family, and are a menace to both Church and State, may be effectively frustrated.

"Governments can assist the Church greatly in the execution of its important office if, in laying down their ordinances, they take account of what is prescribed by divine and ecclesiastical law, *and if penalties are fixed for offenders. . . .*" [Again, the italics are ours.]

WHAT THE CHURCH DESIRES

As an illustration of what the Church desires, the following quotation from the Lateran Pact is given in the Encyclical :

"The Italian State, desirous of restoring to the institution of matrimony, which is the basis of the family, that dignity conformable to the traditions of its people, assigns as civil effects of the Sacrament of Matrimony all that is attributed to it in Canon Law."

As the *Catholic Times* (January 16th, 1931) says, the Pope is here speaking to "the whole human race." He seems to demand that the Catholic view of right and wrong shall be legally enforced upon us who do not share that faith. The public must henceforth wonder whether all Catholic attacks, however well argued, upon eugenics and upon other things more old and dear to our hearts, are not veiled efforts to resume the world-supremacy of the Pope.

Such must be the thoughts of any free citizen who reads this Encyclical with a mind attentive; while if he be also a eugenicist, he will find yet further confirmation of his fears in the recent Vatican decree. Issued since the writing of this article, the text of the decree had not reached us at the time of going to press. But the newspaper extracts make it amply clear that sex-education—which inevitably implies biology—of the young is condemned, as are all "... eugenic theories tending to improve the human race." We gather from the Press that such improvement is considered by the Vatican to be "amply provided for by Divine, ecclesiastical, and human laws regarding marriage and the rights of the individual."

One final query—Is this Encyclical the fruit of the personal wisdom and experience of His Holiness Pope Pius XI, and thus liable to be set aside by a later Pope or a General Council; or is it indeed the *ex cathedra* pronouncement of the Vicar of Christ?

A copy of this REVIEW is being sent to the secretary of His Holiness, with a request for a definite answer to this question.

